



Week of April 30 – May 6, 2008

## How the Air Force buys weapon systems

With all the talk about the Air Force and its efforts to buy a replacement for the Eisenhower-era KC-135 Stratotanker, many Airmen have been curious about how the Air Force goes through the acquisition process.

The office in charge of acquiring new equipment or services, including large multi-billion dollar purchases, is the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, or SAF/AQ. SAF/AQ employs personnel from a variety of career fields with expertise in program management, engineering, contracting, operations and other relevant roles.

When warfighters identify a need, and Congress allocates money for meeting that need, the acquisition team begins the process of acquiring the new weapon system or service. SAF/AQ is responsible for ensuring that warfighter capability needs are translated into specifications that become part of a request for proposals made available to industry. Contractors then submit proposals containing designs and development approaches to meet the requirements. The proposals are then evaluated against a specific set of criteria outlined in the request for proposals. The contractor that satisfies all the criteria while providing the best overall value to the Air Force will win the contract award.

Concerning the competition for our new KC-45A refueling aircraft, the Air Force had a set of capabilities that the offerors had to meet prior to a contract award decision. Two companies submitted offers on the KC-45A tanker acquisition. On 29 February 2008, the Air Force awarded the contract to Northrop Grumman because they clearly met or exceeded the warfighter requirements identified in the request for proposals and will provide the best overall value to the taxpayer. Ms. Sue Payton, the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, commented that the Air Force “followed a carefully structured selection process,” in complete compliance with the law and the criteria established in the solicitation.

The Air Force Chief of Staff General T. Michael Moseley has called the acquisition of the new tanker his highest recapitalization priority. General Moseley went on to say, “A new tanker is critical to our mission of global reach. With our tankers, we can deliver decisive effects anywhere in the world at any time. There’s only so long we can do that with airplanes that were designed in the 1950s.”

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